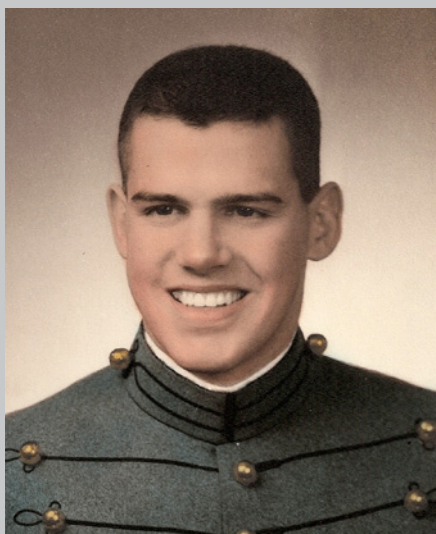


DISTINGUISHED MEMBER OF THE SPECIAL FORCES REGIMENT



CAPTAIN HUMBERTO
ROQUE "ROCKY" VERSACE



Captain Rocky Versace epitomizes all that West Point stands for and all that is meant by "Duty, Honor, Country". Rocky was a Special Forces officer who was executed by the Viet Cong as a Prisoner of War because he would not break under torture. He provided leadership and a great example of courage leadership under the harshest circumstances until his death. The enemy simply could not break this graduate of West Point and so they executed him.

Rocky was "short" on his second consecutive tour in Vietnam after having served for eighteen months with the 5th Special Forces as an advisor to the South Vietnamese Army. Upon completion of this tour Rocky had been planning to leave the Army to join the seminary to return to help Vietnamese children. Instead, in his last month in South Vietnam, his unit was attacked, he was wounded, continued to fight and his unit was overrun. He was taken prisoner by Viet Cong forces in South Vietnam and underwent some of the most horrific conditions including starvation, physical and psychological torture.

Rocky was born in Honolulu, Hawaii on July 2, 1937. His father was an army Colonel and Rocky grew up as an Army brat living on military bases and attending high school in both Alexandria Virginia and Norfolk, Virginia. He attended West Point from 1955 to 1959 and was commissioned in the Armor branch. After graduating from Ranger and Airborne Schools he served in Korea in the 1st Cavalry Division. He then returned stateside to serve in the 3rd Infantry Division (Old Guard) in Washington, DC. Under President Kennedy Advisors were being sent to Vietnam in the early '60s and Rocky volunteered for duty there. Prior to deployment he attended Vietnamese language school and Military Assistance Institute.

In May 1962 he began his tour as an advisor in Vietnam. In May 1963 he extended his tour six months. On October 23, 1963 while acting as an intelligence officer for 5th Special Forces his South Vietnamese unit was ambushed by Viet Cong forces. Although wounded Captain Versace fought a withdrawing action providing cover so that his unit could withdraw. He and two other Americans 1LT Nick Rowe and SGT Daniel Pitzer, were taken prisoner.

Although wounded and weakened he resisted captivity and lived by the Code of Conduct from the outset. He attempted escape four times and was seen by the other prisoners as continually resisting the captors, insulting them in their native Vietnamese and also in French. Over the course of twenty three months he never broke despite repeated torture and abuse. His physical appearance witnessed by his two fellow prisoners showed that while his body was being broken his spirit could not break. He was finally separated from his other prisoners. The last they heard his voice he was singing "God Bless America", giving inspiration to his fellow prisoners and displaying incredible courage in the face of unbearable torture. On September 25, 1965 on "Liberation Radio" the North Vietnamese announced they had executed Captain Versace.

His fellow prisoner LT James "Nick" Rowe was a prisoner for five years until he managed to escape when he overpowered a guard. LT Rowe was the only POW during Vietnam to successfully escape captivity. He later documented Rocky's story in the book "Five Years to Freedom" and personally appealed to President Nixon to award Rocky with the Medal of Honor for his actions before and during captivity. President Nixon assured Major Rowe that he would seek the Medal of Honor for Rocky. Both LT Rowe and SGT Pitzer were the founders of the US Army SERE program at Ft. Bragg, North Carolina based on their own experiences and witnessing Captain Versace's leadership and example before and during captivity. COL Rowe himself was Killed In Action when insurgents in the Philippines assassinated him in 1988 while serving as an advisor there.

Rocky was nominated for the Congressional Medal of Honor in 1969 but the award was downgraded to the Silver Star even though President Nixon personally committed to assisting Captain Rowe with getting the award for Rocky. In 2002 the "Friends of Rocky" were finally successful in getting Rocky his well deserved award for valor above and beyond the call of duty. Despite the fact that the only two witnesses and the nominee were all now deceased the evidence of his heroism being above and beyond the call of duty was overwhelming. On July 8, 2002 President George W. Bush awarded Captain Rocky Versace the posthumous Congressional Medal of Honor.